

GRIEVANCES

TO: Alameda County Board of Supervisors

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Alameda County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Gregory Ahern
Assistant Sheriff D. Houghtelling
Commander Tom Madigan
Captain D. Hesselein

From: Inmates at Santa Rita Jail

Date: February __, 2020

Re: Unbearable Conditions at Santa Rita Jail

We are all inmates under the custody of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office: Santa Rita Jail. Our ultimate goal is to improve the overall conditions unto which all inmates of this institution are subject. We therefore, as inmates, affirm our consensus that the issues we list in this grievance, are common to all of us, and are the most significant issues we all endure. We are filing a group grievance because of the difficulty with filing grievances within Santa Rita Jail.

The Alameda County Sheriff's Office provides no information or guidance on the grievance process. There is an inmate handbook, but most inmates do not receive an inmate handbook. And the information in the handbook is very limited. There is no posted information on grievances or the grievance process, and what information inmates have is through transmission from another inmate, or experience at another facility. Blank grievances are difficult to obtain. Sheriff deputies discourage and pressure inmates not to file grievances. Even when grievances are submitted, the process is such that the jail itself often does not follow its own process, and a carbon copy of the grievance with a tracking number is not returned to the filing inmates. Even when the filing inmate receives the pink carbon with a tracking number, the jail sometimes does not respond, or responds very belatedly. We prisoners have difficulty learning what the Santa Rita grievance process is and even more difficulty correctly following the grievance process.

These practices make filing grievances so difficult, in order to raise our voices and bring attention to the awful, difficult to endure conditions at Santa Rita Jail, we have no choice but to file a group grievance about the daily, long standing, unconstitutional and inhumane conditions of confinement we are subjected to.

Santa Rita needs to evolve its systems and methods away from this punitive and demoralizing jail system with inhumane treatment of citizens and drug addicts to a modernized system and methods of restorative justice! The jail needs to end its culture of cruelty. The current system does not make our communities any safer! To the contrary, it makes them less secure! Inmates leaving the jail are not better for having been in jail. We need to build people up, make them productive and restore their health and vitality.

1. FOOD. The food here is awful and unhealthy. The food served consists of small repetitive, flavorless portions, day in and day out. The food is high in starch and sugar, low in nutritional value, and fresh fruits are primarily oranges and vegetables are primarily carrot nibs. The carrots are often dry and old. Protein is processed soy powder. The "juice" is colored and flavored powder. The food is cooked until there is no texture and no flavor. Then the food is either served frozen, or served after having been in the oven for hours and hours and is dry and hard. Frequently the food served is spoiled and decaying. Milk is sour. We have found vermin in our food (rat and mice feces, and whole boiled mice in the beans). Since the kitchen workers strike, portions have been so small that many of us are left hungry afterwards. The times for meals is arbitrary and random. Some of us have gotten dinner after 10 pm at night. Some of us have had to wait 12 hours between meals. The trays the food is put into are frequently dirty with the left-over caked-on food from a prior meal stuck to the bottom and that day's meal just slopped on top.

WE DEMAND:

- a. regular meal times;
- b. standardized meal preparation - stop placing meals in the oven for hours so that the food becomes dried to a crisp, or meals are served half frozen;
- c. clean trays and better kitchen sanitation;
- d. better quality control – no vermin in our food, no rodent shit, mold or spoiled foods;
- e. greater variety of food;
- f. variations of cold cereals such as Honey Nut Cheerios, Frosted Flakes, Raisin Bran, Fruit Loops, Frosted Mini Wheats, Cinnamon Toast Crunch, etc. ;
- g. hard boiled eggs, waffles/pancakes with syrup, yogurt;
- h. fresh fruits like bananas, blueberries, pears, plums, peaches, melons, grapes, and not just apples and oranges;
- i. fresh salads like Cobb, Caesar, Chef, Asian, Garden, Seafood, BBQ, Santa Fe, and dark leafy greens;
- j. real juice not powdered flavoring to mix with water;
- k. real desserts like Jell-O, pudding, cheesecake, ice cream, pies, cakes,
- l. real meat (and not just soy protein twisted into the shape of a sausage) like chicken on a bone and a more extensive dinner entrée menu and lunch menu; and,
- m. Give us choice in what we eat and grant us the ability to prepare the meals.

2. SAFE AND SANITARY FOOD. We have found razors in our food. Inmate workers have to be reliable and trustworthy. Folks from the Protective Custody population have ample reason to tamper with the food of the mainliners or a way to seek revenge. Thus, we of the mainline population deem it to be unwise to eat food that could be spit in and/or poisoned or adulterated by the PC population.

WE DEMAND: The PC population be only allowed to prepare food for the peers of the PC population and mainliners only prepare food for the mainliners. Under no circumstances should the PC population have access to the food served to mainliners.

3. GROUP PUNISHMENT. On a daily and regular basis, the deputies threaten group punishment, meaning the entire inmate group is punished for the actions of a specific individual or a small group of individuals. The actions of a single individual will result in everyone losing privileges including pod time. A guard's anger and irritation at one individual will result in

everyone suffering. A guard's irritation and anger is easily triggered by asking a question, making a request, or any form of exercise of free speech. Any effort to stand up for oneself, or to stand up for another, even if it is a Constitutional right, or rights which exist under current jail policies and procedures, leads to a guard's anger and irritation. Too many deputies treat all interactions with inmates as confrontations. So, to stifle inmates, guards punish the entire group with the goal that the group will then retaliate against the individual who tried to assert his rights. We inmates live under the constant fear and threat of retaliation, group punishment, assault, verbal and psychological abuse, neglect and more.

For example, due to HU 7's protest after Halloween about the PC population preparing the food, everyone is being punished by being forbidden to work out in boxers. We are told the new rule is that we have to exercise fully dressed. Since we are only given one set of clothing per week, that means everyone, including those new arrestees who were not even here during the protest is now forced to sweat in our clothes and then wear them for the rest of the week. There is no reason to insist that we exercise fully dressed. This is group punishment, and it is wrong.

WE DEMAND that group punishment end. More checks and balances need to be put in place. No deputy should punish someone just due to irritation and impatience. Deputies should stop threatening group punishment. Deputies should stop telling the group to attack or retaliate against individuals. The entire group should not suffer punishment for the action of an individual. Deputies found guilty of group punishment should be subject to discipline. Deputies need to be trained and to practice alternative dispute resolution.

4. GRIEVANCE SYSTEM. Blank grievances are hard to get. Even when we do get a blank grievance, the housing unit deputies pressure us to not file a grievance. Too often we are told that the issue is "not grievable". Complaints about the food are refused because Aramark is a separate company. We do not have adequate writing instruments to write a grievance, only stubby pencils and often broken pencil sharpeners. If we finally submit a written grievance, many times we do not get the return of the pink carbon copy with a tracking number. And if we do, the jail takes whatever time it chooses to respond, if there is a response at all. And generally, all grievances are denied.

The jail does not provide information on the grievance process, including the appeals process. Most of us have never been provided with an inmate handbook. There are no informational posters on the wall.

Moreover, the whole grievance process is completely bias, for its administered, investigated and reviewed by the very same agency and/or deputies an inmate likely has a grievance against. It's nearly impossible to receive a favorable or fair disposition.

The grievance process is broken. If the grievance process is for no purpose, and that there is no possibility of any real change, then say so, and everyone can stop pretending.

WE DEMAND genuine checks and balances. Either an outside agency be appointed to handle the grievances and inmates have an advocate, who inmates can ask for the welfare of inmates.

5. SANITATION. The parts of Santa Rita Jail that the inmates use are filthy. The jail makes inmates responsible for cleaning our cells but refuses to provide enough cleaning supplies,

cleaning tools and only on an irregular and infrequent basis. When supplies are provided, they are provided for too short a period of time. Some of us do not receive cleaning supplies for weeks on end. With 30 people in a cell, or a pod, that leads to inmates living in filth and squalor. Too often, homeless people off the street are simply placed into the housing units without having first had the opportunity to wash. New arrestees detoxing from drugs are simply placed into the cells and are often sick with diarrhea or vomiting, causing the cells to be filthy. As a result, disease, skin infections, and similar issues are common.

The holding cells, the multi-purpose rooms, the cells in ITR are also filthy. Holding cells and often the multi-purpose have feces, old moldy food, garbage, and they stink. Inmates are held in the multi-purpose room for long periods of time and there is no bathroom in the multi-purpose room. Inmates end up having to relieve themselves in garbage cans or in the corner. This is awful and wrong. These rooms need to be cleaned several times a day.

The "shower" in ITR is so filthy, that no one ever uses it, and no one can use it.

WE DEMAND: Inmates should have the ability to clean each and every cell which inmates live in and use, every day, including the multi-purpose room, dress-out cell, all holding cells, cells in ITR, PODS and housing units. Daily: Hot mop, pressure wash, bleach, pick up the garbage. Sufficient and good quality cleaning supplies and tools such as: mops, brooms, dust pans, toilet brushes, sponges, Clorox bleach, Lysol wipes, air fresheners, soap dispensers, paper towels, puncture-proof gloves, should be available at all times. Other jails including San Francisco and San Mateo have cleaning supplies always available so that inmates can clean their cells, their bathrooms and the common areas, every single day, whenever. All incoming inmates must shower and clean hands, fingernails and toe nails before receiving clothing and housing unit assignments. Jail needs to control bed bugs, lice, staph, and other infectious diseases. Stop arresting the homeless! And if they are arrested they must be clean before being placed in housing units.

6. CLOTHING. Santa Rita Jail is very cold and we are provided with inadequate clothing. We are cold! The only foot wear we are given are flimsy, used foam rubber flip flops, which are very slippery. You cannot run in them, you cannot exercise in them, you cannot play sports, and with the water on the bathroom floor, and most floors in the jail being slick, hard concrete floors, inmates regularly slip and fall with flip flops.

WE DEMAND We need adequate clothing, especially in the winter time. two (2) full sets of clothing weekly and a coat, sweater, thermals and a beanie to deal with the cold. We demand that the Sheriff's Office return rubber sole shoes to inmate population. (San Francisco allows inmates to have shoes with laces that tie.) The shoes need to be slip on or Velcro strap, or have shoelaces. They would reduce injury on the yard during recreational activities like basketball and keep one from slipping and falling on the majority of the smooth surfaces which we are forced to walk on. It would also assist with our physical exercise, for working out in flip flops is not an option. Moreover, because the cells and housing unit floors are so filthy, it is not an option to workout barefooted.

7. PERSONAL HYGIENE. Living in such close quarters with so many people, it is difficult to maintain personal hygiene, because the jail does not provide the means to maintain personal hygiene. All inmates have to purchase soap from the commissary, which is expensive, small in

quantity and of poor quality. The commissary also does not provide the necessary products for Black hair. Sanitation of the hair clippers is not provided

WE DEMAND: We demand daily access to personal disinfectants, quality hygiene products and equipment such as Wahl/Andis/Oyster Brand Hair Clippers, trimmers, T-liners.

- Bar soap. Other county jails provide – free – small bars of soap, which work better and are cheaper to use than the poor-quality liquid soaps Santa Rita force inmates to buy.
- Topical antibiotics, bandaids, athlete's foot spray
- Hydrogen peroxide/disinfectant
- Personal sanitation supplies
- Barbicide for hair clippers; Disinfectant sprays and sanitizer solutions for barber equipment
- Maintenance oils and cleaning brushes for the hair clippers;
- Hand sanitizer dispensers
- Gaskets/wet wipes/2-ply toilet paper
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8. MATTRESSES AND BEDDING. We sleep on metal or concrete. The mattresses are..too thin..too old..too dirty. Many of us have developed back pain. Back pain prevents us from being able to sleep, when we are able to sleep. The poor-quality mattresses also leads to regular and constant conflict with inmates requesting and needing two mattresses. A better-quality mattress would eliminate that issue.

WE DEMAND: The same mattress as the ones in Fremont City jail whose mattress are more than 6 inches thick. This is to reduce the need of inmates requiring double mattress and reduce inmates developing back problems. Exchange Blankets monthly.

9. EXCESSIVE CHARGES AND POOR QUALITY CANTEEN. The jail gouges inmates, most of whom are very low income, many of whom are homeless. Telephone costs and canteen costs at Santa Rita are higher than at San Francisco or San Mateo. The sheriff just raised prices of the already high costs of the canteen. And because the food served at Santa Rita Jail is so lousy, many inmates are forced to use their family's money to buy canteen in order to stay alive. A package of ramen in the store that costs \$0.20 costs \$1.13 in the Santa Rita canteen. Not only is the canteen outrageously high pricing and over-charging for dollar store items, the quality and selection is very poor. The food selection is unhealthy. It's vital for people to maintain family contact and the costs of the phone calls is a prohibitive barrier.

WE DEMAND: Lower prices, and greater quality and selection of goods and products in the canteen, and lower costs for telephone calls. Stop profiting off of poor inmates. Prices at commissary should match the federal rates. Telephone rates should be no more than the lower of San Mateo or San Francisco.

9. EXCESSIVE LOCKUPS. Santa Rita Jail locks all inmates up, every day, some in overcrowded cells, others in tiny cells, for too many hours. Some days, we are locked up all day, 24 hours. Santa Rita Jail treats all inmates as objects to be warehoused and every inmate, including all pretrial inmates who are constitutionally presumed innocent, are punished by being excessively locked up in our cells, deprived of real exercise opportunities, deprived of outdoor exercise. We all suffer from enforced idleness, lack of programs and services. We're not

animals. Our movement is already very limited as is. Having a scheduled and regular out of cell time and access to the yard would give us a small a measure of normalcy and a way to plan and/or schedule a full functional day, and a small measure of humanity.

WE DEMAND full daily access to the day room and outdoor big yard for all inmates including maximum classification inmates. Inmates should be allowed access to the day room 10 hours a day.

10. ENFORCED IDLENESS. Santa Rita Jail punishes all inmates, including all pretrial inmates not only by excessively locking us up in our cells, but by the lack of activities, lack of exercise opportunities, lack of outdoor exercise, lack of programs and services. This enforced idleness and warehousing of people creates mental stress, depression, and tension, which feeds conflict between inmates and between inmates and deputies. Furthermore, instead of being to use our time in jail productively to work on problems and make us more able and ready to be responsible citizens, we leave the jail homeless, impoverished, and mentally and physically debilitated.

The jail will say, that every housing unit has a television set. However, while that is true, Santa Rita operates in all ways to make it harsh and as difficult as possible for inmates. The television sets are mounted so that it is hard to see, and almost impossible to hear.

WE DEMAND: comprehensive "inmate services" department.

- a. More educational programs, including career and skills classes not just barbering and baking;
- b. Enough educational classes so that everyone who wants to take a class can do so, right now there are so few classes most inmates are excluded;
- c. Legal Information & Access which respects our right to confidentiality:
 - i. Free legal clinics with actual attorneys, paralegals and law school students, so we can understand our judicial system, ask questions and become more knowledgeable;
 - ii. Law Library - Where we can do our own research and gain access to legal materials.
 - iii. Free legal assistance. For example, in San Francisco, the county provides Prison Legal Services that will perform legal research, make copies, and assist inmates. In addition, each inmate has the opportunity once every two weeks to directly engage in legal research and to personally make copies with the assistance of Prison Legal Services;
 - iv. Assistance so we can try to resolve and solve issues with our families, including divorce, child custody, and notary services;
- d. Incentive program so that inmates who take classes and engage in productive activities and develop good score ratings are housed with greater privileges and freedoms. There are no incentive programs currently in Santa Rita Jail;
- e. Recreational services hosted such as: music, board games, chess tournaments, physical fitness, competitions, sports events, trivia challenges, yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, Insanity,

Basketball teams, baseball teams, flag football teams, soccer teams, fencing, pool, table tennis, frisbee. More books and magazines. Movies, nature programs. Upgrade Television sets so you can see and hear.

f. Increased inmate services for indigent inmates including free weekly postage, five (5) free phone calls a month; writing and drawing materials including paper, pens, and coloring material. Assist inmates in expanding the inmate welfare fund by aiding inmates to seek out aid and sponsorship via charities, organizations and government funding. Indigent inmates should not be denied any liberties afforded inmates with money due to financial status. Nor should those liberties be subpar and/or mediocre. Teach inmates the basics of entrepreneurship including the development of a business plan, filing requirements, funding requirements and all things needed to establish a business.

11. LACK OF JOB TRAINING. Santa Rita Jail's lock-ups and enforced idleness makes people crazy. This is the source of tensions, conflicts, fights, arguments, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. The jail uses enforced idleness to intimidate, harass and threaten all inmates. This leads to a routine hostility between guards and inmates. Over time, Santa Rita Jail has progressively removed programs and potential productive activities so that inmates leaving Santa Rita Jail are worse off than when they arrived. The job training teaches out of date skills, and are sexist. Women receive parenting and baking. Men can take barbering. These existing job classes are inadequate for the current job market.

WE DEMAND: job training and job programs for inmates to participate in regardless of classification status; programs and services that give inmates real world skills and trade accreditation, accolades, certifications, experience and even jobs upon release. These programs and services should be based on hours and do not require lengthy wait periods for an inmate to be admitted. Inmates should be able to pick up where they left off if released from custody or recidivisms occurs. All work and study should be made transferable to apprenticeships and colleges. Examples of programs and services:

Plumbing, HVAC, Landscaping, Computer Science, Carpentry, Automotive Mechanic, Gardening & Botany, Software Programming, Roofing, Masonry, Welding, Culinary Arts, Architecture, Accounting, Diesel Mechanic, Renewable Energy, etc.

12. PUNISHMENT, PUNISHMENT, PUNISHMENT. Santa Rita Jail is wholly focused on punishment and deprivation. There are no incentives for good conduct, no incentives for self-improvement, no means for improving the human relations between guards and inmates. This leads to increased hostility, tension, and fights.

WE DEMAND incentive programs so we can be rehabilitated. This can include good time credits, or some form of a "forgiveness initiative" for the participation and completion of these programs which allow offenders to withdraw their pleas to certain offenses and obtain certifications of rehabilitation and pardon/leniency. We're demanding to be given options to salvage our lives and utilize our time in custody constructively to reduce recidivisms and become productive members of society.

13. DEHUMANIZING PRACTICES. No other county jail strip searches inmates after each legal visit, each and every court hearing and after every work shift. This regular and frequent strip searching is dehumanizing.

WE DEMAND Adopt best practices. – Get Body Scanners (i.e. San Mateo)

13. SLAVE LABOR. Santa Rita Jail creates division and hierarchy with the way it structures work. Some inmates are POD workers, giving them power and control, and also the ability to profit from their work. Inmate workers are treated like dogs, and given “food treats” for working. Kitchen workers, over Halloween, went on strike. This is an example where people feel taken advantage of, and abused. It also leads to a situation where the jail is always trying to pressure inmates to “volunteer” and the quality and caliber of the work is poor, and the jail then is poorly run. This is demonstrated by the marked decline in the quality of the food since the strike. Portion size is now irregular. Time when meals arrive is irregular. The quality of food is much worse.

WE DEMAND that work also be incentivized, either by providing all workers with payment and/or good time credits/and or discounts on the canteen, this would include all inmates who contribute to the jail, including cleaning inside the housing units. Give inmates valuable work experience and a sense of pride and responsibility that comes with honest work. Ultimately, this gives back to the community by encouraging inmates to actively engage in the daily activities of the jail and getting inmates prepared to return to the community and workforce as productive members in society. All inmates should have access to work!

14. MAIL, VISITATION AND FAMILY CONTACT. The jail treats family visits as a burden which it wished could be eliminated and has set up the visiting program to be limited, cramped, difficult and expensive. Many of us have had loved ones travel to the jail only to be told that visitation is “canceled”. Or that the inmate “refused” the visit, when in truth the technician or the deputy did not want to bother with bringing that inmate to the visit, and falsely declare that the inmate “refused” a visit. Family love and family connection are really important for inmates to keep our humanity. Cards and letters and photos are really important. Yet, when the deputies “shake down” a cell, they routinely destroy or confiscate cards, letters and photos. Instead, the jail should be encouraging our family contacts and encouraging our connection to our community. Family connections and community connections assist in preventing recidivism.

We are not animals and even if we were... animals need to be loved too. We demand an end to being devoid, desensitized and dehumanized by the lack of human contact. It's not right that we, cannot embrace our family and loved ones especially since we are not convicted. For example, Kyle Puckett was a pretrial detainee and his case was eventually dismissed. The five years he was in custody in Santa Rita Jail, he never got to hug or hold his son. We demand that we're treated as it is deemed: “Innocent until proven guilty.”

WE DEMAND a more compassionate and intimate visitation service. Such a service would be sensitive to the needs and hardships of the inmate's family and inmate themselves. Services would include, but not be limited to: “Family Days” that would allow all participating inmates full contact with visitation with their family and loved ones regardless of classification, save for inmates in ad seg for disciplinary purposes. We seek conjugal visit privileges, transportation services for family and loved ones with hardships and/or disabilities, meaningful visits not just 15 minutes over the phone and outside food services for visiting families and inmates.

Inmates should not be forced to “miss” video visits or in person visits due to technician and deputy failures:

- Stop placing prisoners in lockdown within 6 hours of visit
- notify prisoners they have upcoming video visits
- allow video visits to begin in lockdown
- Technicians should be set up so they are alerted to when video visits begin
- Technicians and deputies should be disciplined for declaring that inmates have “refused” visits when this is not true.

For blues – stop turning off the phones, promote family communication.

Allow prisoners easy access to call attorneys. Top recording legal phone calls. Implement the federal system to allow inmates email access.

Stop using mail as a means to manipulate inmates. Mail needs reliable and on-time delivery especially for newspapers and an expedited method of sending mail.

15. DEPUTIES AND TECHNICIANS ABUSE OF POWER. While the inmate guidelines say that disrespect for deputies can and often does result in discipline, there is no comparable requirement that deputies act with respect for inmates. A technician who yells “suck my dick”, is not disciplined, and the inmates who complained are threatened. We inmates are often subject to being cursed at, ignored completely, answered with “smart” demoralizing remarks, etc. by technicians. They often disregard inmate requests, fail to open calls for inmate video visits, persuade stand-in deputies on how to run programs to punish and/or get even with inmates (i.e., split tier/one pod), limit inmate free time, cutting off phones or TV unnecessarily and all other manner of psychological warfare. When inmates push the medical emergency button, the technicians often, and regularly disregard us, until the entire housing unit has to scream “Man Down!” Technicians and deputies ignore medical emergencies, and take their time, walking to the cell when someone has a medical emergency. Technicians and deputies falsely claim that inmates “refuse” family visits or legal visits to avoid having to do the work.

WE DEMAND that abuse of power, dereliction of duties, the display arrogance and verbal abuse, by technicians and deputies not be tolerated; that deputies and technicians also be held accountable. Respect must be given in order to be reciprocated. Inmates should have relief from this type of abuse. Provide signage and intake paper stating mutual terms and conditions of respect, standards of conduct and privileges and rights between detainees and deputies.

16. COMMUNICATIONS WITH DEPUTIES AND JAIL STAFF. Deputies and jail staff treat every question or request from an inmate at best as an imposition and annoyance, and at worst as an affront and challenge. There is no positive or healthy means for inmates to communicate or interact with jail staff.

WE DEMAND an Inmate Council, which every California prison has, and which Santa Clara County has instituted, to promote self-regulation, better communication and conflict resolution between inmates and staff.

17. JEWS & MUSLIMS need equal ability to practice their religions including: prayer rugs, Rabbis and Imams to lead services and religious counseling.